

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 4318

STATE PASS WHITE HOUSE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINR, UR, NI
SUBJECT: IMPACT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL VISIT ON THE SOVIETS

1. AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE STATE BANQUET FOR PRESIDENT CARTER AT THE FEDERAL PALACE HOTEL ON THE NIGHT OF APRIL 2, SOVIET AMBASSADOR TETERIN DESCENDED UPON BOLAJI AKINYEMI, DIRECTOR OF THE NIGERIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (NIIA), TO PROMOTE CLOSER COOPERATION WITH THE USSR. TETERIN ENGAGED IN A CLOSE, INTENSE CONVERSATION WITH AKINYEMI FOR ABOUT FIVE MINUTES ON THE WAY FROM THE BALLROOM TO THE HOTEL FRONT DOOR, STATING THAT IT WOULD BE GOOD TO HAVE MORE SOVIET HIGH-LEVEL VISITORS HERE. IN DOING SO HE EXPRESSED HIS REGRETS THAT CHAIRMAN BREZHNEV HAD BEEN ILL IN THE PAST YEAR. AKINYEMI'S RESPONSE WAS IN THE FORM OF A CONTINUOUS SMILE, CLEARANCES OF HIS THROAT AND CORDIAL NODS OF THE HEAD, ALL VERY NON-COMMITTAL.

2. COMMENT: AMBASSADOR TETERIN, BELIEVING THAT AKINYEMI IN HIS ROLE AS NIIA CHIEF IS VERY INFLUENTIAL WITH THE FMG, IS UNDERSTANDABLY EAGER TO IMPROVE THE VISIBILITY OF THE USSR AFTER WATCHING A 60-HOUR NIGERIAN-AMERICAN LOVE FEAST. IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE SOVIETS IN COMING WEEKS WILL BE
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PUSHING HARD EITHER FOR A HIGH/LEVEL VISIT HERE OR A VISIT BY OBASANJO TO MOSCOW. SINCE THE FMG CONTINUES TO ATTACH GREAT IMPORTANCE TO ITS PUBLIC POSTURE OF NON-ALIGNMENT, WE BELIEVE THAT IT WOULD BE RECEPTIVE TO SUCH AN APPEAL. IT IS TRUE THAT THE COMMANDER OF THE SOVIET GROUND FORCES VISITED NIGERIA FOR SEVERAL DAYS IN NOVEMBER OF 1977, BUT THE AMOUNT OF PUBLICITY THAT VISIT RECEIVED WAS ALMOST

NEGLIGIBLE IN COMPARISON WITH THE OBASANJO VISIT TO WASHINGTON AND THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO LAGOS.

3. FROM THE U.S. STANDPOINT, WE THINK THAT THE POSSIBILITY OF A VISIT BY OBASANJO TO MOSCOW SHOULD BE REGARDED WITH EQUANIMITY. HIS VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES, THE WELL PUBLICIZED NIGERIAN SUPPORT OF THE ANGLO/AMERICAN PROPOSALS ON RHODESIA, AND THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO LAGOS HAVE BEEN SO HIGHLY VISIBLE AS TO CONVINCE MANY NIGERIANS THAT THE FMG HAS TILTED FAR TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES IN ITS FOREIGN POLICY. THE FMG'S LEADERSHIP CONTINUES TO BELIEVE THAT A PUBLIC POSTURE OF NON-ALIGNMENT IS THE SOUNDEST AND MOST POPULAR ONE IT CAN ADOPT, HOWEVER, AND IT IS THEREFORE QUITE SENSITIVE TO CRITICISM THAT ITS FOREIGN POLICY IS BASICALLY PRO-AMERICAN. IT WOULD BE LESS VULNERABLE TO CHARGES OF THIS TYPE IF OBASANJO WENT TO MOSCOW OR THERE WERE A HIGH-LEVEL SOVIET VISIT TO LAGOS. FEELING LESS VULNERABLE TO SUCH CHARGES, IT MIGHT WELL BE MORE COMFORTABLE IN WORKING CLOSELY WITH THE USG. MOREOVER, WE ARE CONFIDENT THAT ANY COMPARISON BETWEEN NIGERIAN/SOVIET AND NIGERIAN/AMERICAN VISITS WOULD REDOUND TO OUR ADVANTAGE. THIS IS NOT A COMPETITION TO BE AFRAID OF.

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